

# They like N.Y. in June, how about you?



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SCHWARTZ



It was a fine day for a ramble around Central Park. There was Rakiem Walker with his sax, a whole troupe of folks wheeling it, and a pair of Brits, Claire Tregunno and Paul Brown, leaping for joy on their first trip to the city.

# Yonkers trying to keep waterfront surge going

**BY ABBY LUBY**

**SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS**

DOWNTOWN Yonkers' waterfront has seen good times and bad.

A 10-year building spurt saw developers turn the once blighted area into one with towers of luxury apartments, gourmet restaurants, a sculpture meadow and several parks that will form a 5-mile riverfront esplanade.

But the credit freeze has put the brakes on many projects already approved by the city.

The recent housing market slump caused developer SFC Yonkers to put off constructing 700 residential units in its proposed River Park Center, instead building retail and commercial space.

SFC claimed there is a surge of interest for retail space.

The revised \$1.6 billion development slated for the "Chicken Island" parking lot on Nepperhan Ave. will offer 200 apartments with 600,000 square feet for stores, as well as a 6,500-seat roof-

top ballpark, a 15-screen movie theater, a 2,400-spot parking garage, atrium and public promenade.

After spending \$22 million and borrowing another \$100 million, Homes for America last year abandoned its plan to build four high-rise apartment buildings and some 100,000 square feet for retail. The company ran out of time and money waiting for an environmental cleanup of the site.

Yonkers Mayor Phil Amicone said that the original investors are still interested in the property.

"The cleanup work should be completed before the end of this calendar year," he said. "Then the property is literally ready for development."

The on-again-off again waterfront revival has Yonkers hoping for a financial uptick.

But residents have become wary of developers like SFC, whose initial plan was for dense waterfront luxury housing to support retail.

"River Park is a moving target, it changes all the time," said Terry Joshi, president of the watchdog group Yonkers Committee for Smart Development.

Financial gloom and doom have hit many developers, and the shaky finances of SFC partner Louis Cappelli are no exception. Cappelli is being sued for defaulting on \$163.1 million in loans and owing \$700,000 in taxes for his Trump Park Residences condo in Yorktown. SFC has applied for a \$4.2 million HUD loan through the City of Yonkers. Joshi charged the project is all smoke and mirrors.

Another phase of SFC's plans include building a new municipal building, replacing the one at 87 Nepperhan Ave. and South Broadway. Last year, Yonkers' Industrial Development Agency granted SFC \$50.7 million in sales and mortgage tax exemptions. SFC is also negotiating a deal on future property taxes and tax-exempt revenue bonds.



Yonkers Mayor Phil Amicone says cleanup work and credit squeeze are just temporary hurdles to riverfront plans. Photo by Victor Chu

Critics say the SFC project is not worthy of being underwritten to its original \$1.6 billion cost projection, especially if it includes more retail space.

"With all the empty commercial space available in this area, where is the wisdom in building even more?" said Taffy Williams, chair of the Crestwood Civic Association. "What does this bode for Yonkers with a seriously imperiled economy, where the philosophy, 'shop till you drop' is no longer a reality?"

Amicone said SFC, like other developers, is building retail space because banks are funding the commercial market and freezing loans for residential development.

"When the market comes back, the residential portions of the projects will continue," he said.

Until then, Amicone said he is hopeful that developers will wait out the slumping market.

"They are setting themselves up to break from the gate as soon as money becomes available from banks and investment groups."